

The Role of the Police in the Prevention of Drug Abuse among Young People

The Swedish Approach

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Introduction

The goal of the Swedish public drug policy is to create a “drug-free society”, which means that all non-medical use (abuse) of drugs is to be stopped. The Swedish Parliament had already set this target by 1978.

In striving for this goal, the Swedish Police are entrusted with several important functions. They range from the prevention of drug abuse amongst young people through information and opinion moulding, over the education of parents and other people, to intervention in the drug careers of individuals and the enforcement of drug laws at all levels.

Information and Opinion Moulding

The first aim of the police is to prevent drug abuse amongst young people before it starts. Here, information and opinion moulding are essential in order to keep young people off drugs, because curiosity, drug propaganda and peer pressure may mislead them into testing drugs. Factual information on the risks of e.g. hashish or ecstasy (MDMA) is necessary in order to make young people understand that they are taking very serious risks with their brains and lives if the experiment with drugs.

We have, however, found that drug information becomes much more effective if it closely connected to the establishing of clear norms in daily life. Here the family plays a central role, but 811 adults in their roles as professionals and citizens can assist by helping young people understand the limits of socially acceptable behaviour.

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A special police project, "Viga", based on the American Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) project, combines drug education with clear opinion moulding for healthy, drug-free life styles. The project is carried out in close co-operation with the schools.

There is no discussion of "low-risk use of drugs", "harm minimisation" or "informed choice" in the Swedish public drug information. All drug information has the aim of promoting abstinence from drugs. Also, the public alcohol information for young people aims at promoting abstinence from alcohol until the age of 20.

Education and Training

Education and training by the police for parents, social workers, teachers, health professionals, youth leaders and other groups who have a wide contact area with young people helps to extend the reach of the police in many ways. Education and training can increase awareness of the local drug problem, develop the skills of detecting and diagnosing drug abuse, inform about the laws and give specific advice on various problems.

This is done through the crime prevention branches of the local police, through the drug squads and through the community police. Many Swedish police officers also make voluntary efforts, e.g. by lecturing at youth clubs and social organisations. Also, the Swedish Narcotics Officers Association (SNPF) last year published a textbook, *Basfakta om narkotika*, (Basic Facts about Drugs), which serves as an introduction to all aspects of drug problems and a manual for practical action. The book has already become widely used by groups outside the police.

Through education and training we are able to increase the number of people who participate in the prevention of drug abuse through information to young people, through attention to the early signs of drug abuse and through the creation of norms advocating a drug-free life. This supports the efforts by police and customs to prevent and stop drug crime.

Service to the Media

The Swedish police also give extensive service to the media in the field of drug abuse. We are a very important source of background information, intelligence estimates and case reports for Swedish journalists. In general, the co-operation with the media is fair and based on mutual respect. Most major police operations, such as raids against drug dealing at rave parties, get headline coverage. This is important in creating and maintaining awareness among politicians, parents and other people of the extent and seriousness of the drug problem but most important, it prevents the spread of inaccurate information on for example the risks of various types of drugs. New drugs are often first reported by the police (or the customs), and any seizure or investigation of a new drug creates curiosity of its effects and hazards.

Correct information in the media may help in countering the drug propaganda. By educating the journalists and co-operating professionally with them we have been able to present the dangers of drugs and drug abuse quite clearly. In Sweden, the media in the last two decades have given detailed reports of most of the drugs currently available on the illicit market. For example, in the Swedish media we have had very little "information" on ecstasy (MDMA) and minimizing its dangers. We consider this important in stopping the propaganda and myths surrounding this drug

Intervention and Treatment

Even the best efforts of preventing drug abuse through education may fail, because young people can be exposed to strong pressures from drug propaganda and drug cultures. Open scenes and public rave parties are local environments where drugs and drug taking behaviour may spread rapidly.

Here, the police come into another role, that is of disturbing the scenes, markets and other places where drugs are sold and used. This "disturbance"-tactic is a priority for the local police. Its aims are to scare off people who are curious about drugs, to detect new drug abusers as early as possible in their drug careers and to reduce the demand for drugs. This is an area where the tactics, methods and priorities of the

Swedish Police have a wider scope than that of the police in most other Western countries. Neither the law nor the police accept any possession of small amounts of drugs as "for personal use". Also, in Sweden, the non-medical use of drugs is a misdemeanour, it is punishable by a monetary fine. The police may use urine testing upon reasonable suspicion to detect illicit use of drugs. Perhaps even more important is the fact that the police already have the authority to intervene at low levels of illicit drug consumption and thus stop a further career in drug abuse.

The Narcotics Drugs Act is the most important legal instrument in stopping drug abuse and drug crime. In Sweden, no handling of drugs can take place outside scientific research or medical services without at least one person committing a crime. The Swedish drug laws are absolutely tight.

However, the Swedish Police also have other legal possibilities for the intervention in drug abuse amongst young people. The Care of Young Persons Special Provisions Act (LVU) requests the police to inform the local social service authority whenever a young person is involved in crime or drugs. A large majority of the LW cases brought to court are initiated by the police because of juvenile delinquency or juvenile drug or alcohol abuse. A case involving police intervention will be brought to court more rapidly because of the urgency of the situation (violent crime, drug abuse, vagrancy etc.)

The Young Offenders Special Provisions Act (LUL) requires the police to give priority to cases involving young people. Here, the courts have a possibility of handing over the young offender to a special treatment home instead of sending him to prison.

For adults, the The Care of Alcoholics, Drug Abusers and Abusers of Volatile Solvents (Special Provisions) Act (LVM) can be used by the police to enforce a temporary custodial compulsory treatment for drug abusers if their drug taking threatens their lives or the lives of a relative. In such cases, the police intervention is often the last resort to stop someone from dying from drug abuse or from severely harming someone else. The full investigation is then taken over by the social services of the municipality and the final decision to commit to institutional care is taken by the County Administrative Court. Of all the LVM cases, the police cases constitute a majority

In all LVU, LUL and LVM cases the police function as the first intervention by society, often in situations where life or health is in danger.

The police do not have any therapeutic or repressive functions in these cases, only functions of detection and intervention. The clients are then handed over to other authorities, mainly the social services. The special provisions give the Swedish police a very important function also in the social field, which is quite unusual for other Western police forces.

Enforcement

The last role of the police in preventing drug abuse is through drug law enforcement. Here we fight drug crime at all levels, from international syndicates to local dealers.

A consistent enforcement is necessary to make drug legislation credible (otherwise it will be reduced to only paragraphs in the law books), to support factual drug information and to reduce drug abuse.

Here, the efforts of the National Swedish Police (RPS) at the "police offensive" in 1969 are often quoted as an example that the concerted efforts of the police can bring down not only drug crime and drug availability but also drug abuse in large groups. During the offensive, the actual rate of drug abuse decreased amongst wide groups, the effort thus had a general deterring effect and completely stopped the spread of drug abuse.

In conclusion, the police operations to stop drug crime constitute a very important function in the prevention of drug abuse among young people.

Current Situation

The main problem of today for the Swedish police is the severe cutting of budgetary resources. Many specialised drug squads have been merged with the local criminal investigation departments, thus reducing the manpower for specialised drug enforcement.

Still, we are in a favourable position in comparison to colleagues in other fields and other countries. There is no discussion in Sweden about legalising drugs or about minimising the risks of drugs. In addition to that, police officers in drug enforcement enjoy continuing support from the public, from the media, from the national police author-

ities and from politicians. This is a great help in our efforts to prevent and stop drug abuse amongst the youth.

Finally, we enjoy good support and good co-operation from parents, not in the least from the National Swedish Parents' Anti-Narcotics Association (FMN). This makes our efforts worthwhile, because our mission in this field is to protect our youth from the threat of drug abuse.